



“What Every Business Owner Must Know About Hiring an Honest, Competent, Responsive and Fairly-Priced IT Consulting Firm”

Don't Trust Your Company's Critical Data and Operations to Just Anyone! This Business Advisory Guide Will Arm You With 21 Revealing Questions You Should Ask Any IT Consulting Firm Before Giving Them Access to Your Company's Network

Choosing the wrong IT consultant to support your business can not only be incredibly frustrating and expensive, but could also cost you in downtime, data loss, and expensive repair bills, not to mention the headaches and frustration!

Read this guide and you'll discover:

- ✓ The “dirty little secret” to the IT consulting industry that most people don't know and will NEVER be told by their current IT company. (Knowing this alone could save you from wasting tons of money and untold aggravation when outsourcing your IT support!)
- ✓ 21 revealing questions that will help you instantly spot an unethical or grossly incompetent IT consulting firm in minutes.
- ✓ 3 costly misconceptions business owners have about computer network maintenance and repair; one you will need to know BEFORE you talk to anyone on the phone.
- ✓ Viruses, worms, spyware, and hackers: what you need to know to protect yourself.
- ✓ 5 mistakes to avoid when choosing an IT consulting partner.
- ✓ Why “cheap” or “lowest price” IT consultants aren't the bargain they initially appear to be.
- ✓ The one surefire sign that you should run – not walk – away from an IT support firm.

Provided as an educational service by:
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From the Desk of Vince Tinnirello
Director of Business Development, Anchor Network Solutions, Inc.



Dear Colleague,

Choosing an IT consulting company to partner with isn't easy. There is no shortage of horror stories about incompetent IT "gurus" bungling jobs and causing MORE problems as a result of their loose morals or gross incompetence. I'm sure if you talk to your own friends and colleagues you will get an ear-full of the unfortunate experiences they have encountered in this area.

Why is this? It's because the computer network and consulting industry, along with a lot of other industries, has its own share of incompetent or unethical businesses who will try to take advantage of trusting business owners who simply do not have the ability to determine whether or not they know what they are doing. Sometimes this is out of greed, but more often it's simply because they don't have the skills and competency to do the job right but won't tell you that up front. From misleading information, unqualified technicians, and poor management, to terrible customer service, we've seen it all...and we know they exist in abundance because we have had a number of customers come to us to clean up the disasters they have caused.

Buyer Beware: The IT Consulting & Support Industry Is NOT Regulated

Here's an embarrassing fact about my industry; It is not regulated like many other professional service industries, which means ANYONE can claim they are a "small business IT consulting expert." **In fact, a lot of the businesses in this industry started because the owner was FIRED or laid off from their job and couldn't find work anywhere else, so they just started their own "consulting" business.**

Many professional services businesses are heavily regulated to protect the consumer from receiving substandard work or getting ripped off. However, the computer industry is still highly unregulated and there aren't any laws in existence to protect the consumer – **which is why it's so important for you to arm yourself with the information contained in this report.**



Anyone who can hang out a shingle can promote themselves as an IT expert. Even if they are honestly *trying* to do a good job for you, their inexperience can cost you dearly in your network's speed and performance or in lost or corrupt data files. That is why we decided to offer this report. The information in this Guide is provided to help raise standards within the IT consulting and support industry, and to give YOU useful information to help you guard against unethical or incompetent companies and technicians.

Dedicated to serving you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Uma P. U.", is positioned below the text "Dedicated to serving you,".



About the Author



Vince Tinnirello is the Director of Business Development at Anchor Network Solutions, Inc, a nationally recognized managed IT services and technology consulting firm in Denver, Colorado. Anchor has been named as one of the top 500 Managed IT Service Providers year after year and holds the Global Technology Industry Association Security Trustmark. Vince founded the company in 2002, after being disenchanted with the quality of service being provided by the firm he was working for at the time. Building on his 10-year Marriott hotel industry experience, he started Anchor with the goal of providing hospitality grade customer service to clients in need of technology consulting and support. His vision was to break the stereotype of IT people being difficult to communicate with and even condescending or rude. Over two decades later, Anchor has a staff of over 35 employees and is providing this high touch service to clients throughout the Denver Metro area.



21 Questions You MUST Ask Before Hiring Any IT Company to Support Your Network

Q1: Are there multiple ways to request service, or do you always have to leave a voice mail and wait for someone to call you back?

Our Answer: We have 3 convenient ways to get in touch with us to request service. The easiest and most convenient way is to enter your service request in our client portal, where you can check the status of any open requests, add notes to existing tickets, or run ticket metrics reports. You can also email our Help Desk, or you can call us by phone. We answer our phones live from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and give all clients an emergency after-hours number they may call if a problem arises, including weekends. Why? Because many of the CEOs and executives we support work outside normal hours and find it to be the most productive time they have. If they cannot access their computer network AND can't get hold of anyone to help them, it's incredibly frustrating.

Q2: Do they have a written, guaranteed response time to your service requests?

Our Answer: We have written, Targeted Response Times (TRT) with corresponding issue types and severity levels. This is written into every service agreement we give to our clients because it's standard procedure.

Q3: Do they take the time to explain what they are doing and answer your questions in terms that you can understand (not geek-speak), or do they come across arrogant and make you feel stupid for asking simple questions?

Our Answer: Our technicians are trained to have the 'heart of a teacher' and will take time to answer your questions and explain everything in simple terms.

Q4: Do they consistently (and proactively) offer new ways to improve your network's performance, or do they wait until you have a problem to make recommendations?

Our Answer: We conduct Technology Strategy Meetings (TSMs) with our clients as part of our Anchored IT Process to look for new ways to help improve their operations, lower costs, increase efficiencies, and resolve any problems that may be arising. Our goal with these meetings is to help our clients create a technology roadmap that aligns with the goals of the business, which will ultimately help them be more profitable, efficient, and competitive.

Q5: Do they provide detailed invoices that clearly explain what you are paying for?

Our Answer: We provide invoices delivered consistently and in a timely fashion each month, detailing what services are included so you never have to guess what you are paying for. We also double-check our invoices for accuracy before they are sent to you.



Q6: Do they have adequate errors and omissions insurance as well as workers' compensation insurance to protect YOU?

Our Answer: We have \$2 million of E&O insurance. Here's something to consider: if THEY cause a problem with your network that causes you to be down for hours or days or to lose data, who's responsible? Here's another question to consider; If one of their technicians gets hurt at your office, who's paying? In this litigious society we live in, you better make darn sure that whomever you hire is adequately insured with both errors and omissions insurance AND workers' compensation – and don't be shy about asking to see their latest insurance policies!

Q7: Do they guarantee to complete projects on time and on budget?

Our Answer: All projects are fixed priced and guaranteed to be completed to your satisfaction. This is important because many unethical or incompetent IT companies will only quote "time and materials," low balling the estimated number of hours needed up front to get you to buy. Then, when the project ultimately takes longer, they cite unexpected issues that couldn't have been predicted costing YOU money in additional support hours to complete the project. We see this all the time when quoting a project to a prospective client where a competitor is promising the sun, moon, and stars for a project they simply can't deliver in the estimated amount of time they say it will take. In the few times we've seen a prospect go down that road, they almost always pay more in the end.

Q8: Do they have a service delivery process that they can articulate?

Our Answer: Everything we do is based on process. In this business, you cannot wing it, and you cannot deliver service effectively without a process. We follow The Anchored IT Process, which is our time-tested proven process that starts with aligning your technology infrastructure to best practices and then developing an IT roadmap that aligns with your business goals and delivers results.

Q9: Do they have a new client on boarding process, or do we just start calling for support?

Our Answer: We follow a detailed client on boarding process to set expectations for working with Anchor. We have an on boarding meeting with the client, update them along the way, and conduct an onsite "Welcome to Anchor" meeting with the client's staff to build rapport and excitement around our partnership. When we're all on the same page, we hit the "Go Live" button and start taking client service requests. This ensures a smooth transition for our client's staff as they start working with us.

Q10: Do they have a process for new hires, user terminations, and new computer setups?

Our Answer: We help clients build checklists for new hires, user terms, and computer setups to make their lives easier. Many clients add these to their own HR process as part of the exercise. By following a checklist, we can ensure these tasks are done correctly each time a change is made.

Q11: Do they insist on remotely monitoring your network 24-7-365 to keep critical security settings, virus definitions, and security patches up-to-date and PREVENT problems from turning into downtime, viruses, lost data, and other issues?



Our Answer: Yes; our remote network monitoring system watches over your network and constantly looks for developing problems, security issues, and other problems so that we can address them BEFORE they turn into bigger problems.

Q12: Is it standard procedure for them to provide you with access to written network documentation detailing key network information and settings, or are they the only person with the “keys to the kingdom?”

Our Answer: All clients receive this in written and electronic form at no additional cost. Side Note: You should NEVER allow an IT person to have that much control over you and your company. If you get the sneaking suspicion that your current IT person is keeping this under their control as a means of job security, get rid of them (and we can help to make sure you don't suffer ANY ill effects). This is downright unethical and dangerous to your organization, so don't tolerate it!

Q13: Do they have other technicians on staff who are familiar with your network in case your regular technician goes on vacation or gets sick?

Our Answer: Yes; and since we keep detailed network documentation (basically a blueprint of your computer network) and updates on every client's account, any of our technicians can pick up where another left off.

Q14: When they offer an “all-inclusive” support plan, is it TRULY all-inclusive, or are there “gotchas” hidden in the fine print?

Our Answer: Our “all-inclusive” support plan is just that – all-inclusive. One of the more popular service plans offered by consulting firms today is an “all-inclusive” managed services plan. These plans will save you a lot of money in the long run – HOWEVER, make sure you REALLY understand what is and isn't included. Some things to consider are:

- Is onsite support included or extra?
- What about adds/moves/changes?
- Is any hardware or software licensing included?
- What about 3rd party software support? (We recommend that this IS included).
- What are the costs/consequences of early cancellation?
- What if you aren't happy with their services? Do they offer a money-back guarantee?
- If the hardware and software is included, what happens if you cancel the contract?
- Are offsite backups included? To what degree?
- If you have a major disaster, is restoring your network included or extra?
- What about support of remote offices?

When reviewing proposals from multiple IT firms, make sure the quotes are apples to apples!

Q15: Do they INSIST you have an image based onsite as well as offsite backup, or are they letting you rely on outdated local hard drive or simple cloud-based file backups?



Our Answer: We do not allow our clients to use tape or USB hard drive backups because they are incredibly unreliable. We make sure all our clients use an image-based Backup and Disaster Recovery appliance that fully automates the backup process for both onsite and offsite. This provides clients with a true recovery option in the event of a disaster.

Q16: Do they INSIST on doing periodical test restores of your backups to make sure the data is not corrupt and could be restored in the event of a disaster?

Our Answer: We perform regular test restores from backup for our clients to make sure their data CAN be recovered in the event of an emergency. After all, the WORST time to “test” a backup is when you desperately need it.

Q17: If you were to experience a major disaster, do they have a plan for how your data could be restored FAST and/or enable you to work from a remote location?

Our Answer: All clients with our Datto image based backup solution have the ability to fail over to the cloud, so they can be up and running from anywhere. We encourage clients to do a full disaster recovery plan for their office, but at a minimum, their data network will be covered should something happen.

Q18: Is their help-desk US based or outsourced to an overseas company or third party?

Our Answer: We provide our own in-house help desk and make sure the folks helping you are friendly and helpful. We consider this one of the most important aspects of customer service, plus we feel it’s an important step in keeping your data secure.

Q19: Do their technicians maintain current vendor certifications and participate in on-going training – or are they learning on your dime?

Our Answer: Our technicians are required to keep the most up-to-date vendor certifications in all the software we support. If they don’t currently hold the most recent certification, they must be actively working on it with a set due date. Plus, our hiring process is so stringent that 99% of the technicians who apply don’t make it through. (Guess who’s hiring them?)

Q20: Are they familiar with (and can they support) your unique line of business applications?

Our Answer: We own the problems with all line of business applications for our clients. That doesn’t mean we can fix faulty software – but we WILL be the liaison between you and your vendor to resolve problems you are having and make sure these applications work smoothly for you instead of pointing fingers and putting you in the middle.

Q21: When something goes wrong with your Internet service, phone systems, printers or other IT services, do they own the problem or do they say, “that’s not our problem to fix”?



Our Answer: We feel WE should own the problem for our clients, so they don't have to try and resolve any of these issues on their own – that's just plain old good service and something many computer guys won't do.



The 3 Most Costly Misconceptions About IT Infrastructure Maintenance and Repair

Misconception #1: My computer network doesn't need regular monitoring and maintenance.

This is probably one of the biggest and most costly misconceptions that business owners have. Usually this is because they've been fortunate enough to never have encountered a major disaster; but that's like someone thinking they don't need to wear a seat belt when driving a car because they've never had an accident.

Computer networks are complex and dynamic systems that need regular updates and maintenance to stay up, running fast and problem free. In fact, it's surprising how fast a brand-new PC or laptop will slow down after a few weeks of use without proper updates and maintenance. Here are just a FEW of the critical updates that need to be done on a weekly – if not daily – basis:

- Security patches applied – with NEW viruses and hacker attacks cropping up DAILY, this is a CRITICAL part of maintaining your network
- Antivirus updates and monitoring
- Firewall updates and monitoring
- Backup monitoring and test restores
- Spam filter installation and updates
- Spyware detection and removal
- Monitoring disk space on workstations and servers
- Monitoring hardware for signs of failure
- Optimizing systems for maximum speed

Just like car ownership, if you don't change the oil, replace the filter, rotate the tires, flush the transmission, and perform other regular maintenance, your car will eventually break down and cost you FAR MORE to repair than the cost of the basic maintenance – and cars are far simpler than a computer network!

If your IT consulting company does not insist on some type of regular, automated monitoring or maintenance of your network, then DO NOT HIRE THEM. Lack of system maintenance is the NUMBER ONE reason most people end up losing valuable files and incurring heavy computer repair bills. If your existing IT firm isn't offering you these services, you need to find someone else to support your network for two reasons:

1. Either they don't know enough to make this recommendation, which is a sure sign they are horribly inexperienced, *OR*



2. They recognize that they are *profiting* from your computer problems and don't want to recommend steps towards preventing you from needing their help on an ongoing basis. After all, they'll get paid MORE to remove a virus than to make sure your system is patched, updated and secured (which can be done quickly and inexpensively with good monitoring).

Either one is a good reason to get as far away from that person as possible!

Misconception #2: My nephew/neighbor's kid/brother-in-law/office manager knows this computer stuff and can take care of our computers.

Most people look for a part time "guru" for one reason: to save a few bucks; but this often comes back to haunt them. We frequently get calls from business owners who desperately need our help to get them back up and running or to clean up a mess that was caused by an inexperienced neighbor, friend, or relative who was just trying to help.

If the person you have working on your machine does not do IT consulting and support for a living, there is a good chance they won't have the knowledge or experience to truly help you – they are a hobbyist at best. Do you really want a part-time, inexperienced person responsible for handling something as important as your data and computer network? As with everything in life, you get what you pay for. That's not to say you need to go broke to find a great consulting firm, but you shouldn't be choosing someone on price alone.

Misconception #3: All IT consulting firms are created equal. Your best option will be the one who offers the lowest price.

As we stated a moment ago, you get what you pay for. A cheap price usually means a cheap job. Really good IT consulting firms do NOT work at a discount because they are in high demand just like any other professional. The only firms that will work for highly discounted rates are those just getting started in the business that are very inexperienced. They will typically work for any fee and will be out of business by the time you really need them.

And some shops will hire college kids or newbie technicians because they will work for next to nothing to gain experience (which means they are learning on YOUR dime), OR they will bring in interns because they don't have to pay them at all. An inexperienced technician like this can end up costing more because:

1. They improperly diagnose problems, which mean you're paying them to fix the WRONG thing and they STILL won't resolve your problem.

Case in point: A few years ago a TV reporter went undercover to 8 IT consulting shops in LA with a perfectly working PC, but simply disconnect a cable in the back (a



fix that the AVERAGE computer tech would have caught in minutes with a visual inspection). Several shops improperly diagnosed the problem and wanted to charge them anywhere from \$59 to over \$275 to fix it, and some told the undercover reporter that the hard drive would need to be completely replaced!

2. They could take 3 to 5 times as long to do the same repair an experienced technician could fix quickly. Again, you're paying for those extra hours.
3. They could do MORE damage, costing you more money and downtime.

With your client data, accounting records, e-mail, and other critical data at stake, do you REALLY want the lowest-priced consultant working on your network and having access to your data?

We take the view that most people want value for money and simply want the job done right. You will find that we are not the cheapest, but we don't apologize for that. As the Managing Director, I decided a long time ago that I would rather explain our higher rates ONE TIME than to apologize for POOR SERVICE forever. That said, we're not the most expensive either. We simply feel that we should offer a good service at a fair price. That's why we have been able to stay in business for over 18 years and have many customers who've been with us since the beginning.

Misconception #4: An honest IT consulting company should be able to give you a quote over the phone.

I wish this were true, but it isn't. Just like a good doctor, an honest and professional firm will need to diagnose your network before they can quote any price over the phone; consider the example above where all that was needed was a simple cable being plugged in. If someone brought that to us, we would just plug it back in and not charge them; but without SEEING the machine, we could never have diagnosed that over the phone.

Also, some consultants will quote you a cheap rate over the phone to get in the door, but then jack up the prices once they get in your office by taking 3 times as long, selling you add-ons and up-sells, etc. And finally, reputable firms don't charge by the hour anyway -- they give you a fixed fee, flat-rate. Here's why...

One of the easiest ways to take advantage of a customer is to get them to agree to a time and materials repair. Unless you know what's wrong and how long it should take, they can soak you on the fees. And what are you going to do when they get 5-6 hours into a repair or project and then spring on you the news that it will take even longer than they anticipated to fix, costing you MORE money?

Always, always, always make sure you get a flat-rate, fixed fee quote in advance so you don't end up getting burned – and NEVER take a phone quote!



5 More Mistakes to Avoid When Choosing an IT Consulting Partner

1. **Choosing a firm based on a single phone call.** We recommend you invite them into your office and ask them for a written proposal. Be clear on what your expectations are and what type of problems you want them to resolve. A competent professional should offer to do an audit of your network to diagnose your system BEFORE quoting you anything. After all, would you take a doctor's word that you need surgery if they hadn't done x-rays or other diagnostics? Of course not! Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice.
2. **Choosing an IT company that doesn't have a written money-back guarantee.** In our view, a good consulting firm should be accountable for their services and fixing things RIGHT. If you aren't pleased with a job that was done, they should (at a minimum) make it right for free; and if they simply cannot resolve an issue to YOUR satisfaction, you shouldn't get stuck with the bill.

Plus, the fact that they stand behind their work with a money-back guarantee shows they have confidence in themselves to make you a happy client. And don't fall for the, "We don't offer one because people will take advantage of us," routine. In our experience, MOST people just want an honest service at a reasonable price. If you give them that, they are happy to pay. Are there a few unethical folks out there? Of course, but they are the minority, and we would rather bite the bullet on the very few dishonest folks so we can gain the trust and confidence of the majority of clients who just want their problems fixed fast and fixed right.

3. **Choosing a computer consultant without speaking to several of the current clients.** Check their references! Don't just take the sales guy's word that they are good – ask to speak to at least 3 or 4 clients that are similar to you. If they hesitate or cannot provide you with references, don't trust them!
4. Another good sign is that they should have multiple client testimonials and success stories posted on their web site and throughout their marketing collateral. A lack of this may be a sign that they don't HAVE clients who are happy enough to provide a good reference – again, a warning sign.
5. **Choosing an IT partner who cannot remotely monitor, update and support your network.** In this day and age, a consulting firm who doesn't do this is living in the stone ages. You want someone to do this because it will dramatically increase your network's security and will enable them to do faster repairs. That's not to say they shouldn't come onsite; but remote monitoring and repairs make fixing problems FASTER for YOU and help PREVENT



problems from cropping up in the first place.

6. **Choosing an IT consulting firm who isn't Microsoft Certified.** Consulting firms with this designation have proven to Microsoft they understand the needs of small businesses, and how to provide them with big business technology on a small business budget. They are firms who have a presence in the SMB technology community nationally, which allows them to leverage resources from peers and vendors across the country to solve YOUR IT challenges.

A Final Word...

I hope you have found this guide helpful in shedding some light on what to look for when outsourcing the support of your company's network. As I stated in the opening of this report, my purpose in providing this information was to help you make an informed decision and avoid getting burned by the many incompetent firms offering these services.

If you have any additional comments or questions, we welcome them! Have an idea to make this guide even more helpful? Let us know! And of course, if you are looking for someone you can trust to take over the care and maintenance of "all things digital" in your office, we'd love the opportunity to EARN your business.

Below you will find information on how to request a FREE Network Health Check and Diagnosis. This is, of course, provided for free with no obligations and no expectations on our part. I want to be clear that this is NOT a bait and switch offer or a trick to get you to buy something. Our reputation for being an honest and trustworthy business is something we hold very dear. We would never jeopardize that in any way. So why are we offering something like this for free?

Two reasons:

1. We are simply offering this service as a risk-free "get to know us" offer to people we haven't had the pleasure of doing business with. Again, our goal is to allow you to make an informed and confident decision, and offering this is one way we can help you better evaluate us.
2. This will allow us to determine if we even CAN help you. Obviously we can't help everyone, and our services might not be a good fit for you. Conducting this Health Check enables us to do a small project for you to help you evaluate whether we're the right company for you without risking your money.



Looking forward to your call!

The Team at Anchor Network Solutions

Phone: 303-904-0494

Web: www.anchornetworksolutions.com

FREE Network Health Check For All Prospective Clients Who Want to Put Us to The Test!

As a prospective customer, we would like to offer you a FREE Network Health Check and Diagnosis (\$925 value). During this health check we will perform a comprehensive 8 point audit of your entire network to look for potential problems, security loopholes, spyware, and other hidden problems that will cause the computers on your network to run slow, act funny, crash, and lose data.

We will:

- ✓ Review your system backups to make sure they are working properly, and CAN be restored quickly in the event of a disaster.
- ✓ Perform a Dark Web scan of your domain to see if any company credentials have been involved in a breach.
- ✓ Check for security updates and patches to validate that your network really IS secure.
- ✓ Review your firewall and security settings.
- ✓ Check the integrity of your server hardware (Side Note: Did you know that hardware failure is one of the leading causes of data loss that CAN be detected early and avoided with proper monitoring?)
- ✓ Audit your virus definitions and protection.
- ✓ Conduct a visual scan of your server room and cabling to make sure your network is PHYSICALLY safe and set up properly.
- ✓ Check your overall system performance, space, and settings to see if your network is running as fast as it could be.

Why Should You Care About This?

Because there are literally dozens of ways hackers and viruses can access your network—undetected—to remotely control your network, corrupt your data, and use your network as a conduit for spreading spam, viruses, and even illegal software.

There are numerous system checks and updates that should be done on a regular basis to ensure maximum speed, performance, and security. Ignore them and your system will get progressively slower, more unstable, and increasingly susceptible to viruses, spyware, and hackers.



File level backups may not be enough in the event of a disaster. Do you have the right backup in place for your recovery time and recovery point objectives? You don't want to find out the current solution doesn't meet your objectives the day after your hard drive fried.

How To Request Your FREE Network Health Check:

Requesting your FREE Network Health Check is easy. There are three ways to get in touch with us:

Phone: 303-904-0494 x105

Email: vince@anchornetworksolutions.com

Read on To Hear What Our Clients Have To Say:



I would highly recommend Anchor Network Solutions. I think of Anchor as a partner not just as a vendor. They are a true extension of our team. Not only are they available to troubleshoot issues as they arise but they are proactive in making sure our systems are performing at their best. Vince was right when he assured me they would streamline our processes and save me valuable time! *Carri Clemens, Linhart Public Relations*



Blue Sky Plumbing & Heating has had the pleasure in working with Anchor Network Solutions since 2008. Their team's prompt service and response time has far exceeded our experience with other IT firms we had dealt with in the past. We've seen a huge reduction in our network and individual PC downtime which has greatly increased our efficiency and productivity. Their desire to keep up with the latest technology has helped our organization stay ahead of many others offering similar services. I would highly recommend Anchor Network Solutions to any organization looking for great service, experts in their field and an overall "top notch" IT service provider.

Jesse Lanyon, Blue Sky Plumbing & Heating